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THE ROUND TABLE

ONE WAY TO GET SOCIAL LETTERS WRITTEN

It falls to my lot rather frequently to "visit around" among the high schools of the state, occasionally for several days at a time. Of course, I plan projects for my classes to do in my absence, usually putting students in charge, either singly or in committees, and I sometimes fancy better work is done while I am not present to interfere too much. But just to make sure that the members of the class do not forget me and that they accomplish a little bit of work that I have first-hand knowledge of, I have fallen into the habit of asking the students to write me letters telling me "how things are going." This proved to be such splendid writing that I extended the idea somewhat: when the students themselves are absent either one at a time—when, for example, they are doing substitute teaching—or as a whole, during a vacation period, they are asked to write me. If Shakespeare could write sonnets either when his friend was absent or when he himself was absent, surely, I thought, my students could write letters under either set of circumstances.

The device has worked so well that I am moved to tell other folks about it and present two or three letters as evidence of the value of the work. Observe how natural the letters are. Do you notice the glint of humor here and there, the spontaneity?

Here are three letters. The first, I may explain, was written while I was in Chicago last February attending the meetings of the English Council; the others, during the spring vacation. I have not changed a word or a comma.

FAIRMONT, W.VA.,
February 25, 1919

MY DEAR MR. BARNES:

You no doubt are glad to be away from school for a short time. I would be very glad if I could do the same. Nothing would please me better than to be in Chicago. But of course teachers always tread the rosy paths of life while the poor students tread the thorny.

Yesterday your English class met and an outsider coming in the classroom would not have noticed but what our regular teacher was there. So far as your class is concerned you will not have to worry and may extend your visit over a long period of time if you wish. I know if you had to depend upon the

Monongahelia Valley Traction Company to bring you back from Chicago you would be very slow in returning.

Mr. Barnes as you are in a large city and will have a chance to study the styles for ladies, I think it would be well for you to give an oral report to your class next week, telling about the latest styles for women in Chicago and comparing the styles that are seen there with the ones shown here.

This is a subject that is of vital interest to every member of the class except one [we had one boy in the class] and he may have an indirect interest. You always said you wanted practical subjects dealt with in your class and subjects that we are interested in. That is why I selected this subject for you to report on.

I hope you will enjoy being at the conference, where so many eminent men from all over the states will be assembled.

Yours truly,

503 STATE ST.,
FAIRMONT, W.VA.

April 5, 1919

DEAR MR. BARNES:

In your assignment you told us to write you a letter and tell you how we spend our vacation. I am sure that my experiences will not interest you in the least so therefore I will make my letter short.

Mother isn't able to go ahead with the house cleaning so therefore I thought it best for me to spend my vacation in beating rugs, washing curtains, cleaning windows, polishing furniture, etc. That is what I have been doing. I think it is bushels of fun. I enjoy it because I get to boss the job.

I am hoping that we will have a number of new students enroll for the spring term. Of course, I tell every one that our school is the best. I can tell them with a clear conscience, this semester, that I like it but really I could not have the first of the year. I think the reason I didn't like it was because it was such a sudden change from high school. Our Junior class is now getting some "pep" in it.

I hope you will not give me zero on this although I know it is what I deserve.

Yours truly,

FAIRVIEW, W.VA.

April 7, 1919

DEAR MR. BARNES:

I certainly do like for vacations to come but I don't think I want another one, like the one that is now at an end.

I came home on Wednesday, after the last class. I was very happy to be away from school books for a while. I am rather unusual am I not?

On Thursday afternoon, I went to the High School, to a literary society. I used to be a member of this particular one so I was rather anxious to visit it. The program was very good. I was appointed as one of the judges in a debate. I voted for the negative side and my conscience bothers me yet over my decision. I was called upon to speak and I feel very embarrassed when I think about it.

I spent the rest of my vacation in my room at home. I don't think I had the influenza but it was something like it. This is the reason my letter is late.

I am going to try to come to school tomorrow but my mother wants me stay home, this week. I am afraid Fairmont Normal will leave me though so I am coming back sometime this week.

I mentioned the English campaign to one of my former English teachers some weeks ago. She asked me if we would object to her having one in the High School. I told her I didn't think so. So the English campaign began in Fairview High School this morning. It lasts one week, too. Of course, the program for the week is nothing like ours is going to be. It is more simple than ours and doesn't take as much work either. My sister told me I had better leave town before the students of F.H.S. found out that I was the one who brought the idea to Fairview. So I will be in Fairmont soon as my life is in danger.

Very sincerely,

M. C.

STATE NORMAL SCHOOL
FAIRMONT, W.VA.

WALTER BARNES

A "WEE BIT" EFFORT

The article on "A Creative Approach to Literature" in the *English Journal* appealed to me, as I had just been trying to do somewhat similar work with my high-school Juniors and Seniors. I believe that even with boys and girls of high-school age much good may be obtained from an attempt at verse-making. If they produce little which is worthy of being read twice, even by the instructor, still they may be made to see the difficulties of rhyme and meter, and may look with greater wonder and appreciation upon the poetry that they formerly tossed aside after a single reading. Although the results of our work last spring were often amusing, some readers may be interested in the following, which shows what can be done in this sort of theme work, even when it is "ground out" at the relentless bidding of a merciless English teacher.

The poem was published in the June number of our school magazine, the *Quiver*.

FLORENCE P. MOWRY